



Tips For Traveling To Disney World With Ehlers-Danlos Syndrome (EDS) or Other Physical Limitations.

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Disney World is a wonderful place with so many fun things to do, but it is also quite large and for some, can be overwhelming. I am writing this article to provide tips for people with EDS to experience an “EDS-Friendly” Disney trip or for anyone with a condition that limits their mobility to enjoy visiting Disney World. I have been treating people with EDS for over ten years now and my physical therapy clinic sees over 100 people each week who have EDS. During this period, I have been fortunate enough to visit Disney World several times. I have extensive experience, both with treating EDS and with experiencing the *Magic of Disney*.

SCOOTERS

When I go to Disney, I typically walk about five to ten miles a day, depending on what parks I visit and if I’m staying at a Disney hotel where I walk in and out of the parks each day. For that reason, I recommend that most people with EDS or with walking limitations rent a scooter to make their trip more enjoyable and manageable, saving precious energy for having fun instead of walking for miles. You will see several scooters being used in the parks by people of all ages. You can take the scooter all around the parks, on Disney buses and boats, into most restaurants and all the way into your hotel room. If you’re staying on Disney property, ask your hotel what companies have a contract with Disney in which they can deliver the scooter directly to your hotel. A few companies will leave it with Bell Services where you can pick up the scooter at your convenience, but most will make you meet them in person at the hotel within a 2 hour window which can sometimes be inconvenient. Most companies only deliver between 9:00am and 5:00pm. Just ask the hotel, because companies with contracts with Disney can change. Also, you may want to book with a company that offers a canopy (to shield you from the sun). Even though you aren’t walking, being on the scooter in the Florida sun can get quite warm. If you have issues with CCI (craniocervical instability), you may want a high back scooter, giving your head more support and making it less likely that someone in the crowd will bump your head. Pack an empty large backpack. It will fit nicely, hanging it by the shoulder straps on the seat back of the scooter for extra supplies for your day in the park (rain jacket, sweatshirt, snacks, sunscreen, etc.), or you can request an extra basket to attach to the back of the scooter. Also bring a small cooler (that fits a 6-pack of soda) and ice pack. It will probably fit in between your feet on the scooter. You may need to bring medicine or extra drinks into the park with you for the day. Scooters come with a basket, but it’s quite small. You can always get free tap water from any of the quick service restaurants throughout the parks as well. Make sure to pack comfortable, supportive shoes (preferably a good quality running sneaker) even if you choose to rent a scooter.

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DISABILITY PASS

When you arrive, go to Guest Services at the entrance of any of the parks the first day you are spending in the parks. Get in line and ask a cast member if you're in the right place to request a disability pass. Sometimes they have a shorter line just for disability passes. Plan on waiting in line at least an hour to get your pass. All members of your party need to be with you because they'll scan everyone's magic bands (bracelets you wear that contain all your tickets, room access and reservations) and they'll also take your picture for the disability pass. The last I checked, you do not need to provide a doctor's note or explain your medical history. You just need to describe your limitations (if you have heat intolerance and cannot stand for a long time without getting lightheaded or passing out, that usually qualifies). Most people with EDS have those symptoms, or describe whatever limitations are appropriate for you. Verify that this pass will be valid for your entire stay and that you do not need to go to Guest Services each day to renew it. This will allow you to enter rides without waiting in long lines. For the more popular rides, you may still wait a bit, even with a disability pass. Go up to the ride you would like to go on and a cast member will escort you to the accessible entrance or will give you a time to return. Just verify with a cast member how the disability pass system works, as they are always changing things and updating policies. You can call Disney before you go just to verify if they will require you to bring any supporting documentation to request a disability pass. You can also ask questions about policies regarding service animals. When you enter each park, there are brochures/maps listing all rides with descriptions. They have a separate brochure labeled "Guide for Guests with Disabilities." That will list details regarding rides that are not suitable if you are not able to transfer out of a wheelchair or walk a short distance and will also list which rides a service animal can ride with you or which ones have an option to leave your service animal with a cast member for a short time while you go on the ride. There are numerous rides that are handicap accessible and you can usually take a scooter all the way through the line until you are ready to board the ride. Also, ask cast members about special viewing areas for fireworks for people with a disability pass.

FOOD

There are also many gluten-free food options and more extensive dietary needs can be accommodated at the sit-down restaurants, but not so much at the quick service (take out) restaurants. Most sit-down restaurants require reservations, which you can make 180 days prior to arrival (which I highly recommended). Mention dietary restrictions when you make your reservation. But, if you're making reservations for the more popular restaurants (Ohana, Snow White at Artist Point, Cinderella's Royal Table, Be Our Guest), make your reservations online 180 days prior to check-in and call Disney back later to add dietary restrictions. It will take you too long to do it online when you're making the reservations and some restaurant reservations sell out quickly. When you get seated for a sit-down meal, tell the server that you have allergies/dietary restrictions. The chef will come out to your table to discuss what you can eat, especially for a buffet, and will give you an allergy menu with all food items listed which contain major allergens.

RIDES

You should read descriptions of any ride you are thinking of going on and ask a cast member about any concerns you might have and decide what is right for you. My recommendations are **just suggestions** that work for most people with EDS or mobility limitations, but **ONLY YOU** can decide what is safe for you. The following recommendations are listed park by park.

MAGIC KINGDOM

Fine For Most: All character meet and greets, Carousel of Progress, People Mover, Buzz Lightyear's Ranger Spin, Dumbo, Journey of The Little Mermaid, Peter Pan, Mickey's Philharmagic, Prince Charming's Carousel, It's a Small World, Haunted Mansion, Country Bear Jamboree, Jungle Cruise, The Enchanted Tiki Room, Magic Carpets of Aladdin, Adventures of Winnie the Pooh and Monster's Inc. Laugh Floor.

These are generally slow moving rides with minor jerking movements, but many of them require walking a short distance on a moving platform or stepping up or down into the ride, so check with a cast member before riding.

Maybes: Astro Orbiter (may cause dizziness), Pirates of the Caribbean (has a few moderate drops in boat with some jerking movements), Mad Tea Party (lots of spinning), and Seven Dwarfs Mine Train (smooth, but moderate drops and one sudden stop at end of ride). You probably want to avoid these "maybe" rides if you have CCI.

Probably Not: Thunder Mountain and Space Mountain (fast, lots of jerking and up & down movements), Splash Mountain (a few moderate drops and a 50ft drop at the end).

ANIMAL KINGDOM

Fine For Most: All character meet and greets, most animal trails (ask if scooters or service animals are allowed), Na'vi River Ride, Festival of the Lion King Show, Finding Nemo Show, Up! A Great Bird Adventure Show and Triceratop Spin.

Maybes: It's Tough To Be A Bug (things poke you in your seat that might startle you and water gets sprinkled at you), Kilimanjaro Safari (moderate jerking movements riding in Jeep), Rafiki's Planet Watch (scooters may not be allowed and you'll need to walk a fair amount to get around this section of the park), Avatar Flight of Passage (virtual reality with moderate drops, possible motion sickness), and Kali River Rapids (moderate jerking movements with a moderate drop at the end).

Probably Not: Expedition Everest (large drops, goes backwards, moves fast), Primeval Whirl (fast and lots of spinning) and Dinosaur (fast, extreme jerking movements, a few moderate drops).

EPCOT

Fine For Most: All character meet and greets, visits to the countries, Spaceship Earth, Soarin', Living With The Land, Nemo, Figment and The Three Caballeros.

These are generally slow moving rides with minor jerking movements, but many of them require walking a short distance on a moving platform or stepping up or down into the ride, so check with a cast member before riding.

Maybes: Frozen Ever After (moderate drop in boat).

Probably Not: Test Track (jerking movements and goes up to 60 mph) and Mission Space (confined space and jerking movements).

HOLLYWOOD STUDIOS

Fine For Most: All Character meet and greets, Beauty and The Beast Show, Disney Junior Dance Party, Fantasmic Show, Frozen Sing-Along, Indiana Jones Stunt Show, Jedi Training (for kids and you need to sign up at least 30 minutes before park opens), Voyage of the Little Mermaid Show and Muppet Vision 3D Show.

Maybes: Toy Story Mania and Alien Swirl (slight jerking movements and spinning).

Probably Not: Slinky Dog Dash (fast, large drops and quick turns), Tower of Terror (large free fall drops), Star Tours (large jerking movements and possible motion sickness) and Rock 'n' Roller Coaster (fast, quick drops).

In general, you probably want to avoid most boat rides if you have CCI because of unexpected frequent bumps. Also, be careful going over uneven pavement with CCI. There are some new rides that have opened since I've been to Disney, so I cannot comment on those. So, be on the lookout for a follow up article on newer rides.

OTHER GENERAL TIPS

I hope these recommendations help make your trip enjoyable and pain-free. Make sure you pack good sneakers and any braces, tape, canes or gadgets that you have just in case you need them. Wear light layers and loose clothing to accommodate for swelling that may occur in the heat. You may want to bring noise-canceling headphones if you have sound sensitivities. I usually recommend packing any medication or "must have" items in your carry-on bag just in case your luggage gets lost or delayed. Pack an extra day or two of medicine in case you get delayed flying home. Call your airline first and verify the limitations regarding items in your carry-on bag so you do not have any problems. There are generally strict policies regarding liquids, medicine and medical cannabis/CBD products. Just because cannabis/CBD might be legal in your home state, laws may be different in Florida or while flying. If you are staying on Disney property, you can take advantage of the Magical Express which is a bus that will take you to your hotel for free from the Orlando Airport and they will send your bags directly from your home airport to your Disney hotel if you make a reservation in advance and have Disney mail you special luggage tags for your bags. This will save you from

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lugging your bags once you arrive in Orlando. However, if you arrive after 9:00pm to Orlando, you will need to claim your bags at the airport baggage claim and take them to the Magical Express bus yourself. Check with Disney when you book your hotel for more details. Plan for days off during your trip to rest and recover. Look into discounted tickets that start at noon or after 4:00pm to save money and for those who have POTS or who might need more time to get going in the morning.

Some places to cool off in each park if you're overheated:

Magic Kingdom: The Emporium Store on Main Street, Cosmic Ray's Starlight Café, Columbia Harbour House, all gift shops

Epcot: The Land Building (where Soarin' is located), Innoventions, Electric Umbrella, all gift shops in each country and throughout the park

Animal Kingdom: Pizzafari Restaurant, Satu'li Canteen, Restaurantosaurus, all gift shops

Hollywood Studios: Star Wars Launch Bay building, ABC Commissary, all gift shops

Please feel free to email me at muldowneyptnorth@gmail.com if you have any questions regarding Disney or EDS. I love to make recommendations for "newbies" or return visitors to make your Disney trip truly magical. There's so much to do and see, you don't want to miss a thing!

In the words of Walt himself:

"All our dreams can come true, if we have the courage to pursue them. First, think. Second, believe. Third, dream. And finally, dare." Walt Disney